

Points for Wrap up

Richard Jones

This is my first VP and I was generally very encouraged. In the first session we heard Nick Stern mention his experiences in India where I recently spent four years in the DFID Delhi office. DFID has a very focused poverty reduction agenda and it was interesting to hear Nick refer to

The Voices of the Poor

As Our SoS had signed the preface, I thought I should read it but found that Voices of the Poor are virtually silent on Energy other than a couple of trivial references to stealing electricity. Are his references to the role of energy in Opportunity, Empowerment and Security an after thought? I think not but there are many people in the development business who need convincing.

Therefore it was Wonderful to hear Robert Thompson emphasising the importance of energy for rural development and later on Arun Sanghvi telling us about Energy for Rural Transformation. I began to believe that the old interpretation years ago of the IBRD as the International Bank for Reckless Disbursement might now be changed to the International Bank for Rural Development.

Warnings

But I heard some warning signals.

Arun slipped in a quick reference to his “target of 70MW” - why 70? And why MW I ask. Surely it should be about the number of Starfish thrown back into the water.

Dominique mentioned supporting the WEA target of 500kWh per person but what will the majority of the 1bn poorest conceivably use all that energy for. Compare this to Adam Harvey’s 65 household village transformed by the provision of a 2kW generator.

The references to the need to consider the individual were many. I frequently had to wait at a traffic light on the Delhi Ring Road where there was a display showing the estimated population, the last digits ticked over at frightening speed as I waited for the lights to change. We have to try to match that speed but must beware ignoring the bottom up demand driven approach for fear of falling behind in the numbers race.

Links with ICTs

[Early career in power utilities, then power projects, moved on to power sector reform then to include renewable energy and finally I have been given ICTs.]

On the first day thought I had come to the wrong conference as it was all about ICTs.

But it makes sense on a number of levels apart from the obvious one that you need electricity to power ICTs

From a development department perspective, the target of poverty reduction needs to be addressed within a sustainable livelihoods approach and ICTs and energy are but part of the input require to meet this target.

The ICT workshop frequently highlighted the links with health, education, enterprise development, community use in a very cross sectoral way with not too much concentration on technology. Energy is less often thought of in the same way but it should, it is not the technology but the services it provides, cooking, heating, lighting, motive power, communications, entertainment, cold beer etc. that is the need. There are other parallels, which were mentioned on Monday - the problem of regulation, the role of the private sector for example.

The initial ICT stories coming from villages indicate that remote communities can adopt new technologies, the same will apply to energy services.

How

Admiral Truly posed the question “How do we do it”. We heard a number of suggestions. I have two to offer:

One

- we should use the new ICTs to support our efforts, to share experiences. Many presenters gave details of Web sites and one can go hunting for these on the Internet. What is needed is some means of simplifying the search and being more pro-active with the publicity. We have spoken within ESMAP of this knowledge-sharing requirement and DFID has linked its own energy site to ESMAP along with other donors. There could be an opportunity for the Village Power Partnership to build on this and the knowledge bases which no doubt exist in the other sponsor organisations.

Two

- we should not push energy as a sector but as a tool for development but we will not do this as energy practitioners, despite the excellent examples of success stories we have heard over the past two days from those who have. There are still too many out there who will tell you that energy is not an important issue, that indoor air pollution is not a major problem for Africa, and it is here that I get passionate and think of the African women who carry loads that take two or more of her colleagues to place on her head, not a few hundred meters but for hours, day after day only to end up inhaling the combustion products at hundreds of times the levels considered safe in the western world. So we need to take the information out not only to the energy practitioners but the wider development community. We need to support champions such as Robert Thompson with good evidence of the contribution energy can make. We also need to convince the finance sources, we heard from a few of them this morning and especially the need for “Patient Capital” let us make sure it is not a patient needing treatment we end up with.

Mr. Wolfensohn, who I believe works somewhere in the Bank, said we cannot solve the problem alone. This also is true for the wide range of energy people, we cannot solve it alone, we have to engage with the other development people not pushing our agendas but joining together in true poverty reduction strategies. A questioner asked yesterday, "What is planned on raising literacy on energy issues" - too little I fear, including in the development business itself.

I hope these two suggestions, use of ICTs and engaging more with the development community, will go a little way to removing the dark spots on the view from Challenger and that the title Village Power will come to mean village empowerment rather than just electrification.